2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

621 626 753 his mother was ill and had gone with Lupunje's younger brother to the diviner to find out the cause of the illness. The diviner indicated that Lupunje thought that Kalambo was not showing him the proper respect. Lupunje knew that his sisters had lost their value in the lineage since they had stopped bearing children, whereas Kalambo's sisters were still reproducing. His malice had caused the woman's illness. When Kalambo got home he asked his mother's brother to blow water out of his mouth [1] and help him to prepare some medicine for the sick woman. This Lupunje did and the woman recovered immediately.

Shortly afterwards Kalambo remonstrated with his mother's brother for causing the illness of his sister, but Lupunje said that he had no control over it: the spirits had brought it on her. Kalambo knew that he could do nothing and abandoned the idea of building his own village. He knew that there was bound to be more illness if he carried on with his plan.

182 621 626 Clearly the belief in the mystical powers of the ancestors or of sorcery is a force which prevents sections from breaking away from the village. A break follows only when opposition within the village has reached sufficient pitch to force one of the sections to take the risk of illness, rather than to continue living in the village. Sometimes the dissident group comes back because further deaths at their new village site convince them that their action was wrong.[2]

Effects of the Headman's Personality

622 Whether a village maintains its unity or not, depends very largely on the personality of the headman. This is why the officiating headmen and others at the installation ceremonies are so insistent that cases should be settled quickly. The main duty of a headman is to maintain harmonious relationships within his village and to see to the welfare of its members. All severe [787] illnesses are immediately reported to him, and so are the results of all divinations. He usually sends his representative to divinations [764] concerning kinsmen not related to him matrilineally. He is immediately notified of all deaths and he organizes the funeral 622 rites. Squabbles are brought to him for arbitration and even 692 where squabbles are settled by kinsmen in the village, usually the headman is formally told of them. Frequently marriage diffi-

[1] An act which arouses malice. See Chap. VI, p. 139.
[2] See the case history in Chap. VI, p. 133.

6: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7

be noted that only 27—11 per cent. of the whole sample of 246 women—had never married and that 23, 80 per cent., of these (or 10 per cent. of the total) were under the age of 20 and therefore stood a good chance of yet marrying. Furthermore, 2 of the 4 women over 20 who had not married were known definitely to be incapable of marrying (one is insane and the other has violent epileptic fits).

There were 33 women who were divorcees or widows (13·3 per cent.), but it should be noted that 27 (or 11 per cent. of the 246 women) were over the age of 45 and therefore were past, or nearly past, the child-bearing period. Those in the younger age-groups stood good chances of remarrying. Table IV shows that though the divorce rate is high[1] remarriage is common. By the time a woman's child-bearing period has ended she has been married on the average 1·7 times. Few marriages are contracted after child-bearing ceases.

TABLE IV. *Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage experienced by all Women over the Age of 15*

Present age	No. of women	No. of marriages contracted	No. of divorces experienced	No. widowed	No. still married	No. of marriages per woman	No. of divorces per woman	No. of marriages per woman ended by death of husband	No. of marriages per woman still existing
15–20	43	22	1	..	21	0·49	0·02	0·00	0·46
20–30	78	124	36	4	84	1·59	0·45	0·05	0·81
30–45	70	122	30	18	73	1·73	0·71	0·25	0·79
Over 45	55	88	19	31	25	1·60	0·35	0·56	0·48
Total	246	355	116	53	183	1·56	0·47	0·22	0·67

These statistics, showing the early age of marriage, the early commencement of child-bearing, the high incidence of marriage among women, and the high rate of remarriage during the child-bearing period, all point to the high valuation of reproduction reflected in Yao culture. This is consistent with their social structure, where the major corporate groups are kinship groups and reproduction is the principal method of recruitment to the group. Furthermore, because the standard of living is almost at subsistence level, children do not entail the economic losses they do in Western society. On the other hand, they are expected to support their aged parents when they themselves are economically independent. In other words, there are few factors militating against reproduction and many in favour of it.

We may expect the beliefs and customs surrounding child-birth to reflect the value of reproduction. For instance, the Yao distinguish clearly between women who have borne children and those who have not. When a girl becomes pregnant for the first time she undergoes a special ceremony (*kitâo*) attended only by women who have borne children. This ceremony has many of the features of a *rite de passage* and appears to mark the passing of the woman to a new social status. Furthermore, women are ascribed status according to the number of children they have borne. The word *awuali* signifies a young woman who has not yet borne a child; *awuali*

[1] Between a third and a half of the marriages contracted by women had been dissolved by divorce by the time that the child-bearing period had ended.